



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Northeast Fisheries Science Center
166 Water Street
Woods Hole, MA 02543-1026

May 1, 2007

MEMORANDUM FOR: Northeast Fisheries Observer Program Observers

FROM: David Potter
Branch Chief, FSB

SUBJECT: Observer Program Regulatory Compliance

The Northeast Fisheries Observer Program is providing observer coverage of Category I and II fisheries under the authority of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) of 1972 **AND** various other fisheries under the 1996 Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) amendments. The following information is to provide you with information on what is required under these Acts and how to report a potential compliance issue.

The topics addressed in this memo include:

- ▶ Observer Requirements
- ▶ Safety Requirements
- ▶ Trip Refusals
- ▶ Safety Deficiency Reports
- ▶ Observer Procedures During a Coast Guard Boarding
- ▶ Field Diary
- ▶ Guidelines for Preparing an Affidavit
- ▶ Data Release Policy
- ▶ Selection Letters

Enclosures in the plastic expandable file case include
(also available on <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/femad/fsb/>):

- ▶ 2006 List of Fisheries
- ▶ USCG Safety Requirements for Commercial Fishing Industry Vessels
- ▶ Contact Information for USCG Safety Examiners
- ▶ Contact Information for NOAA Fisheries Office of Law Enforcement
- ▶ Data Release Forms (10)
- ▶ Observer Duties Sheets (10)
- ▶ Selection Letters (10)



- ▶ Safety Checklist (10)
- ▶ Trip Refusal Report (10)
- ▶ Office of Law Enforcement Safety Deficiency Letter (10)
- ▶ Safety Decal Reminder with Numbers (10)

Also, please file any of your issued Fishermen Comment Cards, your personal Letter of Introduction, and your Certificate of Insurance in this folder. Please keep this folder with you on deployments in case the captain would like to request any of the information. You may wish to file any other forms that are commonly requested by fishermen in the folder, such as Meal Reimbursement Forms or NEFOP Introduction Booklets.

Observer Requirements

Vessel owners and operators selected for observer coverage are responsible for complying with regulations set forth by the Marine Mammal Protection Act (50 CFR § 229.7) and the Magnuson-Stevens Act (50 CFR § 600.746), which state the following:

The observer requirements for participants in Category I and II fisheries are [50 CFR § 229.7(c)]: If requested by NMFS or by a designated contractor providing observer services to NMFS, a vessel owner/operator must take aboard an observer to accompany the vessel on fishing trips. After being notified by NMFS, or by a designated contractor providing observer services to NMFS, that the vessel is required to carry an observer, the vessel owner/operator must comply with the notification by providing information requested within the specified time on scheduled or anticipated fishing trips.

NMFS, or a designated contractor providing observer services to NMFS, may waive the observer requirement based on a finding that the facilities for housing the observer or for carrying out observer functions are so inadequate or unsafe that the health or safety of the observer or the safe operation of the vessel would be jeopardized. The MSA Health and Safety Regulations hold the vessel out of compliance if they continue to fish without an observer due to safety inadequacies that have not been fixed [50 CFR § 600.746(d)(2)].

The vessel owner/operator and crew must cooperate with the observer in the performance of the observer's duties including: Providing, at no cost to the observer, the United States government, or the designated observer provider, food, toilet, bathing, sleeping accommodations, and other amenities that are equivalent to those provided to the crew, unless other arrangements are approved in advance by the Regional Administrator;

Allowing for the embarking and debarking of the observer as specified by NMFS personnel or designated contractors. The operator of a vessel must ensure that transfers of observers at sea are accomplished in a safe manner, via small boat or raft, during daylight hours if feasible, as weather and sea conditions allow, and with the agreement of the observer involved;

Allowing the observer access to all areas of the vessel necessary to conduct observer duties;



Allowing the observer access to communications equipment and navigation equipment, when available on the vessel, as necessary to perform observer duties;

Providing true vessel locations by latitude and longitude, accurate to the minute, or by loran coordinates, upon request by the observer;

Sampling, retaining, and storing of marine mammal specimens, other protected species specimens, or target or non-target catch specimens, upon request by NMFS personnel, designated contractors, or the observer, if adequate facilities are available and if feasible;

Notifying the observer in a timely fashion of when all commercial fishing operations are to begin and end;

Not impairing or in any way interfering with the research or observations being carried out; and

Complying with other guidelines or regulations that NMFS may develop to ensure the effective deployment and use of observers.

It is unlawful to fail to take an assigned observer on a fishing trip [50 CFR § 229.7(c)(1)]. It is unlawful for any person to assault, harm, harass (including sexual harassment), oppose, impede, intimidate, impair, or in any way influence or interfere with an observer, or to attempt the same. This includes any action which has the purpose or effect of interfering with the observer's responsibilities, or which creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment [50 CFR § 229.3(b)].

The general prohibitions listed under the Magnuson-Stevens Act (50 CFR § 600.746) (MSA) are applicable to any fishing vessel required to carry an observer under any U.S. law and include, but are not limited to:

Fail to submit to a USCG safety examination when required by NMFS pursuant to Sec. 600.746.

Fish without an observer when the vessel is required to carry an observer.

Assault, oppose, impede, intimidate, or interfere with a NMFS-approved observer aboard a vessel.

Prohibit or bar by command, impediment, threat, coercion, or refusal of reasonable assistance, an observer from conducting his or her duties aboard a vessel.

Violations of the MMPA may result in sanctions on Authorization Certificates, civil penalties of up to \$12,000 and criminal penalties. A complete list of MMPA prohibitions can be found at 50 CFR § 229.3. Violations of the MSA may result in sanctions on Federal fisheries/operator permits, civil penalties up to \$120,000 per violation, civil forfeiture of catch/vessel, and/or criminal penalties.



Safety Requirements

On May 18, 1998, NMFS published regulations under the Magnuson Stevens Act that address the health and safety of observers stationed aboard commercial fishing vessels. Under these regulations, observers may not depart on a fishing trip aboard a vessel which does not comply with United States Coast Guard (USCG) safety requirements or that does not display a current Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examination decal [50 CFR § 600.746(c)(1)] or does not meet the safety checklist.

Fishermen can schedule a free dockside examination to obtain a current safety decal by contacting the nearest U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety Office Dockside Examiner.

All vessels required to carry an observer must meet USCG safety requirements and display a current safety decal (issued within the previous two years). Vessels that do not meet these requirements are deemed unsafe for purposes of carrying an observer and must correct noted deficiencies prior to departing port [50 CFR § 600.746(d)(2)]. Failure to meet safety requirements which result in failure of a vessel to take an observer once selected for that trip will constitute a "refusal" and may result in enforcement action against the individual and vessel.

The vessel owner/operator must allow an observer, NMFS, or NMFS-appointed-contractor to visually inspect any safety or accommodation requirement if requested [50 CFR § 600.746(c)(2)]. Observers are required to complete a pre-trip safety check of the emergency equipment and are encouraged to review emergency instructions with the operator prior to the vessel departing port. A completed Safety Checklist must be sent in with each observed trip.

Trip Refusals

If asked, a fisherman must take an observer, for fisheries listed under the MMPA as a Category I and II and fisheries listed under the MSA. A refusal occurs when an observer informs a fisherman that they have been selected for observer coverage and the fisherman refuses to cooperate with the observer. The reasons for refusing an observer must be clearly reported and will be evaluated on a case by case basis. A refusal based on principle (a fixed or predetermined policy or mode of action) or lack of insurance are not legally legitimate reasons to not comply with observer requirements. Deliberate behavior to avoid the observer or deceive them by providing incorrect information regarding the vessel's fishing activities is considered a refusal.

When requesting a trip, be clear, firm and polite. The observer must clearly communicate that the permit or vessel has been selected for coverage. If refused, confirm that the skipper is denying the observer coverage by asking "Are you refusing to take me?". Politely inform the operator that you are required to document all refusals.

The observer must note all dialogue that occurred between the parties, including dates and times, weather conditions, fishing conditions, trip logistics, and safety issues. The notes must be



complete and factual and may be used to write an affidavit if warranted. Notes about trip refusals may initially be documented in observer field diaries. The observer should then complete a Refusal Report and immediately report to the Area Coordinator (AC). The AC will submit the report to the Program Manager, from there to the NMFS Contracting Officer Technical Representative (COTR), Area Leads, and Operations Coordinator. If the refusal warrants enforcement action, Area Leads will work with NOAA Office of Law Enforcement to obtain the appropriate level of response.

Any harassment, intimidation, or assault of an observer, interference with their work, or tampering with their equipment is strictly prohibited and should be immediately reported as the observer finds appropriate and necessary for the situation. The observer may contact enforcement directly under these extreme circumstances if time is of the essence, and then follow the chain of command listed above.

Safety Deficiency Reports

Failure to meet safety standards equate to a trip refusal and must be reported using the Trip Refusal Report and following the procedures detailed below.

For proper documentation of this event, an observer must have:

- ▶ two (2) standard letters from the Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) citing the safety deficiency
- ▶ and a Pre-Trip Vessel Safety Checklist
- ▶ and a Trip Refusal Report

Once a vessel has been determined to be unsafe to deploy either due to a lack of a current decal or failing to meet the top six (6) safety devices on the checklist and the safety measures can not be corrected immediately:

- ▶ Complete a Pre-Trip Vessel Safety Checklist;
- ▶ Fill out one OLE letter to the captain citing the deficiency;
- ▶ Notify the captain and give him/her the completed letter of deficiency(s);
- ▶ Disembark from the vessel and do not complete a trip on the vessel until the corrective measures have been met;
- ▶ Complete a second letter citing the deficiencies to send to the office;
- ▶ Complete a Trip Refusal Report with your signature and date;
- ▶ Contact your AC by phone once off the vessel;
- ▶ Email the AC and Program Manager as soon as possible detailing the safety refusal and attaching an electronic copy of the Trip Refusal Report; and
- ▶ Fedex the safety refusal documents to NMFS within 24 hours, including the letter citing the deficiency, the Pre-Trip Vessel Safety Checklist, and a signed Trip Refusal Report.

It is critical to report these safety deficiencies in a timely manner and to have complete and accurate documentation of the event.



Observer Procedures During a Coast Guard Boarding

The USCG makes periodic boardings of fishing vessels to inspect them for fisheries and safety violations. NOAA OLE personnel may also be present. If the USCG boards the vessel you are on, introduce yourself. After that, remain in the background and let the boarding party know where you can be found. Do not remove yourself completely from the scene unless asked to do so. Do not join in any discussions between boarding party members and vessel personnel unless asked. The USCG or NOAA OLE personnel have certain objectives to accomplish in every boarding.

If the boarding party has questions or requests your assistance, be cooperative. Most Coast Guard officers are not biologists and you may be of assistance in identifying species of fish and invertebrates on deck or in freezer holds.

Make sure your diary and paperwork are in order in case the boarding party wishes to inspect them. If possible, avoid giving anyone your original logs or your diary. However, they may insist on retaining your paperwork as evidence. An observer can not refuse to provide the data or logs if they are likely to contain evidence of a violation of the MSA or MMPA. The USCG and NOAA OLE personnel have the authority to seize evidence under both acts. Do not resist the enforcement efforts on scene. If possible, make copies before turning the originals over. If the vessel you are on has no copy machine ask if copies can be made on board the Coast Guard vessel. You may request that copies be obtained at the dock when you land. If this is not a possibility, at least make handwritten copies or summarized notes if there too many logs to transcribe. Generally, the USCG and NOAA OLE will get copies back to the program once back on shore. If they need to contact the National Marine Fisheries Service, have them call the Fisheries Sampling Branch Chief, David Potter, at 508-495-2262.

If you have information on suspected or actual violations, or other problems, you may or may not wish to relay them to the boarding party. Use your judgment to decide if a potential violation would best be reported to the boarding party or saved for debriefing. The observer's role is not one to report violations, it is to collect non-biased scientific data. The USCG is aware that observers may or may not choose to advise them of witnessed violations dependent on the situation.

If you have no information for the boarding party but someone in the boarding party wishes to question you, find a private location for your conversation. On occasion, an uninformed boarding party member may ask you questions in front of vessel personnel. Should this happen, defer the questions until you can speak in private if this would be better. If that doesn't work, ask if they will accept a written statement from you. If you are questioned in private, answer all questions completely and honestly. Your testimony is one part of the whole investigation. Your role in a Coast Guard boarding is as a source of objective information for the boarding party. The boarding party will conduct their own inspections and investigation, and they may or may not require your assistance. You should cooperate fully, and not hamper the investigation.



When the trip lands, observers should call their area coordinator (AC) as soon as possible after the boarding or enforcement questioning and document the event fully. Observers should then submit a report in writing as soon as possible to the AC and Program Manager by email if possible. The report should include details regarding the boarding such as the vessel name, date, times, what kinds of questions were asked, what items were inspected, what were the areas of concern, what citations were written if any, whether they requested to look at the observer's trip logs, whether they questioned any observer data or equipment, and what questions they specifically asked the observer. The electronic report will be forwarded immediately to the COTR, Area Leads, Operation Coordinator, and Branch Chief.

Field Diary

The purpose of the field diary is to provide documentation of activities and duty situations. The field diary is official, and the exclusive property of the government. It must be safeguarded and with the observer at all times. It cannot be tampered with, destroyed, or discarded by the observer or any other non-government employee. As property of the government, the field diary is not releasable by the observer to anyone, including vessel captains or owners. The field diary also serves as a valuable supplement to log data, and may help to support or explain situations that are not clearly documented on the logs. As such, it should be completed in a timely and chronological manner, in conjunction with the observer's logs. Completion of the field diary should not detract from the amount or quality of log data. The observer should use a field diary to document compliance situations, safety issues, gear conflicts and U.S. Coast Guard boardings. They serve as an official place to record notes as situations occur and can be later referenced if having to complete a Trip Refusal Report, affidavit, or U.S. Coast Guard report. Up to five trips may be recorded in the same diary, but it should be sent in as soon as something serious occurs. No more than five trips should be recorded in one diary. Send diaries in when mailing in trip data.

Each field diary should be labeled on the cover, in permanent marker, to include the following information:

- ▶ observer name,
- ▶ vessel name(s) and documentation number(s),
- ▶ and the corresponding observer/trip identifier(s),
- ▶ beginning and ending dates for each trip, and
- ▶ corresponding gear type(s) (fishery/fisheries).

Prior to each trip should be a "header" page. This page should include the above information specific to each trip. Record the date for each day of diary documentation on each page used. If a day's documentation continues beyond one page, record the date at the top of each subsequent page. Record the local time, using the 24 hour clock (0000-2359) of each entry. Each entry in the diary should be documented in the manner detailed below. All documentation should be objective in nature. Personal, judgmental, and other comments do not belong in this official field diary. All diary documentation should be recorded in pen. Entries should be concise, but



provide all of the necessary detail, facts, and observations. Activities should be recorded using vocabulary consistent with the manual. Make sure any information which is “log data” is also recorded on the appropriate log(s). Try to write legibly. If a mistake is made, don’t white-out, tear out, or otherwise obscure the original entry. Use one line through an incorrect entry, and initial and date any changes made to the original text.

Diary entries should be made to document the following situations:

- ▶ **Compliance Situation:** As soon as a compliance situation begins to occur (*i.e.* refusal to take an observer, harassment of an observer, impeding an observer’s duties, *etc.*), diary documentation should commence. Be as specific and factual as possible. Present a clear picture of the development of the situation. The following guidelines are especially pertinent in order to document a compliance situation:
 - Provide factual identification of the problem area, as soon as it is perceived, even if the perception is only slight. If the perception is mistaken, or the action corrected, no harm will occur from the additional documentation;
 - Provide the time, location, and listing of other individuals present at each incident;
 - Provide exact quotations of involved individuals, whenever possible; and
 - If the situation is resolved, provide clear documentation as to when and how.
- ▶ **Safety Issue:** Any relevant safety issue regarding a particular vessel, deployment, fishery, etc. should be recorded. If a captain ever states a safety issue as the reason for not allowing an observer’s sampling activities to occur, this should be clearly documented, and the conditions cited as unsafe described.
- ▶ **Gear Conflict:** A gear conflict is when two or more vessels and/or the vessels’ gear interact during fishing activities. All of the events surrounding the incident should be recorded in detail, including what happened to any foreign gear brought onboard the vessel. If the observer was not present to witness the conflict, the observer should record the captain’s story, as told to him/her, along with any other information available.
- ▶ **U.S. Coast Guard Boarding:** Occasionally, the vessel to which an observer is deployed may be boarded by the U.S. Coast Guard. The following information is necessary to record:
 - boarding and debarking dates and times of the U.S. Coast Guard,
 - U.S. Coast Guard cutter name, and boarding officer(s) name(s),
 - the nature of the boarding and items inspected,
 - description of the observer’s involvement in the boarding,
 - description of any problems that occurred during the boarding, and
 - safety issues surrounding the boarding incident.



Guidelines for Preparing an Affidavit

An affidavit is a written declaration made under oath before an official, as a notary public. If violations are to be pursued, the observer must be prepared to write an affidavit. An affidavit should be a detailed, non-inflammatory, concise, and factual description of the events that led up to and including the violation(s).

Use the following guidelines when writing an affidavit:

- ▶ Define crucial information (names, dates, times, locations);
- ▶ Detail events in chronological order as they occur;
- ▶ Do not summarize or minimize events;
- ▶ Identify each time an event occurred;
- ▶ Maintain objectivity, do not use personal opinions;
- ▶ Use complete sentences in a narrative, not outline form;
- ▶ Write in the first person, active tense; and
- ▶ Should be written on plain paper and may be handwritten or typed.

The first paragraph should be an introduction of yourself: your name, who you work for, what position you hold, how much experience you have, your education, and any other pertinent background information that would support your credibility.

Example: I, (*First/Last name*), was employed by (*Contractor*) to serve as an observer for the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). I have served as a NMFS fisheries observer on (*number of*) trips, and on this trip served aboard the (*vessel name and vessel number*) fishing in the (*fishery name*) with permit (*permit number*) from (*embark to disembark date*), where I witnessed an (or several) incident(s) of (*state suspected violation*). I received a (*highest schooling degree*) from the (*school name*) in (*year of graduation*). I have successfully completed certifications in C.P.R., vessel safety, and NMFS fisheries observer training.

Referring to your diary and logs, detail the event addressing the following questions:

Who committed the violation?

What was the violation?

When did it occur?

Where did it occur?

Why did it occur?

How did it occur?

You should close the affidavit with the following and sign and date:

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the above statement is true.

Data Release Policy

Vessel owners or captains acting as authorized representatives for an owner may request copies of the raw observer logs. Data can not be release without submission of a completed Trip Data Release Form. The recipient of the data is responsible for the data upon its release. Release of



data for trips in which more than one vessel participated (i.e pair trawl trips) may occur only if captains or owners from both vessels complete and submit a Trip Data Release Form.

Observers should offer the captain a Trip Data Release Form at the completion of every trip. If they request a copy of the trip, have them complete the form with the trip information, vessel information, their signature, and address. The observer should complete the bottom portion of the Form, tear it off, and have the captain retain the bottom portion for their records. The remainder of the top form is sent in to NMFS with the trip. NMFS will make copies of the trips and send copies to the requestor. If the captain wants the copies right away, the observer can make copies of the trip and fill in the section on the form that states: Copies Released By and Date. Copies made by observers would not be “edited”. If observers make copies of their trips, make sure not to leave them unattended on a copy machine, or pass them off to non-programmatic staff for copying.

For follow up information on data releases, please contact Patricia Yoos at (508) 495-2338 or Patricia.Yoos@noaa.gov.

Selection Letters

Observers may elect to issue a standard selection letter to serve as the captain’s official notification of being selected for observer coverage. The selection letters are issued and signed by the Northeast Regional Administrator. The observer may fill in the vessel name and hull number. If further arrangements must be made to set up a trip, the observer would fill in their name and contact information. The letter can be hand-delivered or mailed to fishermen, particularly if a trip becomes difficult to arrange or if the observer wants a more formal commitment for a trip. If selection letters are issued, please notify the AC of when they were handed out and to whom.

If you have any questions regarding the requirements listed under the Marine Mammal Protection Act or the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, or relating to refusals or affidavits or anything contained in this memo, please contact Amy Van Atten at (508) 495-2266 or Amy.Van.Atten@noaa.gov.

